

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

THE PROPER SPECIFIC NAME FOR THE ORIENTAL
CATFISH USUALLY CALLED *PLOTOSUS*
ANGUILLARIS (BLOCH).

BY HUGH M. SMITH.

In 1794 Bloch (*Naturgeschichte der Ausländischen Fische*, VIII) established the genus *Platystacus* and included therein two new species, *cotylephorus* and *anguillaris*. These fishes are not congeneric, and when, in 1863, Bleeker made *cotylephorus* the genotype the species *anguillaris* was left without an available generic name. Incidentally, *cotylephorus* belongs in the genus *Aspredo* (Scopoli, 1777), and *Platystacus* became a synonym. In the meantime Lacepède (*Histoire Naturelle des Poissons*, IV, 1803) had set up the genus *Plotosus*, with *Platystacus anguillaris* as the haplotype, and the fish has generally been known as *Plotosus anguillaris* since that time.

There was, however, an earlier available name which had been given to the fish by Carl Peter Thunberg in a paper entitled *Tvänne Utländska Fiskar* (*Kongliga Vetenskaps Academiens Nya Handlingar*, XII, 1791, p. 190). The fish, called *Silurus lineatus*, was described in considerable detail and was unmistakably represented on a plate shared with a new goby (*Gobius patella*), both species being ascribed to the Indian Ocean.

It would therefore appear that the proper name for this fish is *Plotosus lineatus* (Thunberg).

Cuvier and Valenciennes (*Histoire Naturelle des Poissons*, XV, 1840) revived the name *lineatus* for the fish but made no reference to its previous employment and wrote *Plotosus lineatus*, nob. They pointed out assumed differences between their fish and *P. anguillaris*, but Bleeker, Günther, Weber and de Beaufort, and other authorities have had no hesitancy in regarding *lineatus* of Cuvier and Valenciennes as a synonym of *anguillaris* of Bloch.

The availability of the name *arab* for this species naturally comes up for consideration. This designation seems to have originated with Bleeker, who at first credited the name *Silurus arab* to Forskål (*Descriptiones*

Animalium, 1775) but later adopted it as his own. In his *Systema Silurorum Revisum* (1863) he designated *Plotosus arab* "(= *Plotosus anguillaris* Lacepède = *Silurus arab* Forskål)" as the type of *Plotosus*, and in the *Atlas Ichthyologique* (II, 1862) he called the fish *Plotosus arab* Bleeker, thus illustrating the peculiar conception of nomenclatorial priority and propriety which existed at that period. In recognizing *Silurus arab* Forskål as a valid name, Bleeker was followed by Günther (*Catalogue of Fishes in British Museum*, V, 1864) and by Day (*Fishes of India*, 1878); but while Günther did not, as consistency required, adopt *Plotosus arab* as the approved name for the fish, Day did so.

An inspection of Forskål's work will make it obvious that the word "Arab." as used on page XVI was not intended as a specific name, but was a Latin abbreviation for Arabicus. It was followed immediately by "*Boa vel Buja*," indicating Arabian vernacular names for the fish, as was frequently done by Forskål. In this particular case, the fish appears among 56 species "nominati," while 114 other species are "descripti." Four kinds of *Silurus* are listed in the first category of which three, *mystus*, *anguillaris*, and *clarias*, are printed in italic type, while for the fourth no name except the Arabic vernaculars is given, although there is a brief description which leaves no doubt that the present species was involved. If Forskål had intended to make a new species he would undoubtedly have followed his invariable course by placing it in the other list and later in the same work providing a detailed description as was done for the 114 new species cited.

The synonymy of this species was unnecessarily complicated by the action of Jordan (*Genera of Fishes*, I, 1917, p. 66) in listing *Silurus anguillaris* as mentioned by Forskål as the equivalent of *Platystacus anguillaris* Bloch. The former specific name, thirty-two years older than the latter, represents a catfish, of an entirely different family, now known as *Clarias anguillaris* and dating from Linnaeus, 1762.